



INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN 96-02B  
DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DIVISION

### *Reptile-Associated Salmonellosis*

This informational bulletin presents guidelines for people who handle reptiles and the steps they can take in order to prevent infecting themselves or others with *Salmonella*.

#### What is Salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis is a disease caused by *Salmonella* bacteria. It manifests as fever and bloody diarrhea and can be very incapacitating to lethal depending on the immune system of the person who becomes infected. Many animals are reservoirs to the bacteria and can transmit the infections to humans through either contact with their bodies, their waste products or by ingesting the animals themselves. Reptiles are one animal species that harbor the organism.

#### Who Should Avoid Contact with Reptiles?

The following categories of people should avoid all contact, direct or indirect, with any reptile as the risks of serious, symptomatic infection with *Salmonella* is greatly increased.

- Infants and children up to 5 years of age.
- Anyone with HIV/AIDS or other disorders or medication that suppresses the immune system.
- Elderly, frail or people with poor nutritional status.
- Women who are pregnant due to risk to the fetus.

#### What to do to avoid becoming infected or acting as a carrier.

- Reptiles should not be kept in child-care centers.
- After handling reptiles, be sure and wash hands with soap and hot water.
- Keep reptiles out of kitchens and away from any surfaces where human food is stored, prepared or served.
- Do not use kitchen sinks to clean reptile accessories or caging materials.
- Do not permit unsupervised handling of reptiles by children under 12 years old.
- Teach children to wash hands thoroughly after handling any reptile.

#### A Case History

December of 2001 a 3 month old infant was taken to an emergency room after experiencing a day of bloody diarrhea and fever. The infant was sent home with no therapy and recovered in 2 days; a stool specimen yielded *Salmonella* serotype Nima. Although no reptiles lived in the home, the infant's father was a high school biology teacher who handled reptiles in the classroom, including a large boa snake that he often draped over his shoulders. A stool culture from the snake grew *S. Nima*. When interviewed, the father indicated that he knew reptiles carry *Salmonella* and was careful to wash his hands after handling them or the containers. However, he did not change clothing when he came home from work before holding his child.

\*Document available in an alternate format upon request